

88-AC-172-108 EDITORIALS

Ours is A Great Place

Gov. Tom Vilsack has initiated an interesting plan to help communities realize their potential by targeting state government resources and attention on Iowa's "Great Places." Next October, a committee to be appointed by the governor will select three pilot communities to participate in the Great Places program.

Storm Lake should be one of them.

"Great Places" is sort of an extension of the Vision Iowa program. If a community has a great project, like Storm Lake does with Awaysis, the Great Places program helps marshal all the state's programs to help get the project rolling. Up to \$8 million in grants will be available to the three pilot communities. Also, a "coach" from state government will be assigned to the community to help wade through the bureaucracy.

Storm Lake has tried to do the Great Places program on an informal basis, so we might as well formalize it. Our "coach" has been Jeff Vonk, director of the Iowa Department of Natural Resources with great assists from Mike Blouin at the Department of Economic Development and Mark Wandro at the Department of Transportation. Vonk is the one who has encouraged us to get the lake cleaned up and then capitalize on the resource. He has assigned a lakes coordinator, Mike McGhee, to advocate on our behalf. IDNR has tried at every level to navigate the Byzantine ways of politics, bureaucracy, rules and regulations.

We would like to expand the partnership to a permanent basis. Our coach could move on to another team with a change in administrations, and there goes the franchise. But Storm Lake has a lot of scoring yet to do: We need to continue lake dredging, we need to develop Casino Beach Marina, we need to get some sort of state resort designation, we need a performing arts center, we need a nature interpretive center on Little Storm Lake, we need more bike trails around the county and safer trails around the lake, we could use a recreation center ... you get the point. The plan is there, we just need continued state help in executing it.

The Iowa Department of Cultural Affairs, headed by Anita Walker, is coordinating the Great Places initiative among 18 state agencies. A meeting is scheduled for Spencer Community Theatre on May 18, from 4-6 p.m. We hope that Storm Lake has a huge turnout at this meeting. We would note that Storm Lake City Clerk Patti Moore offered to host the meeting, but the site already had been selected. We are told that Walker and some of her colleagues are interested in visiting Storm Lake.

The governor has already created the program through executive order, so this is not an "if" proposition. It is something that Storm Lake should seize, and Storm Lake is a place where the initiative is sure to

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succeed because so much ground has been plowed.

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